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ABSTRACT

Effectiveness ratings of principals by researchers have frequently been hampered by relying on teachers' one-dimensional, research-triggered "global" ratings. This paper reports a 1979-80 British Comumbia superintendents' study geared toward multidimensional subjective assessments of 266 administrators, and concentrates primarily on ways in which superintendents make their evaluations. The first section deals with data--including distributions of general evaluator ratings and of ratings by positions--and with evaluation strategies. The next section presents a random sample of 77 reports and examines the aspects on which evaluators focus as they consider principals' schools, rather than their behaviors. Professional background, as well as descriptors (adjectives) describing the evaluated, are addressed in the third section, although it is chiefly given to analyzing the number (290) and variety of principals' actions in terms of a 4-dimensional framework, The next section relates differences between reports of differently rated principals, and conclusions are drawn in a closing section. (KS)

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THE ASSESSMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS

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the Annual Conference of the
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The measurement of effectiveness in principals may be said to have been a persistent problem, both in the long tradition of research in school administration and in the recent spate of "school effectiveness" studies. As Bridges (1982) notes, researchers who have attempted to assess the effectiveness of administrators have relied heavily on ratings made by teachers. Such ratings, he points out, have usually been global ratings, and they have in most cases been used in relation to a single dimension such as "interpersonal efficiency", "instructional supervision" or "communication".

A further concern about effectiveness ratings is that they are, for the most part, what might be called "research-triggered"--that is to say that they have been given in response to a researcher's request to do so, and they have not been "real" in the sense that they might have been if they were given as part of the respondent's working life. This point is echoed by Rowan et al.(1983) who note that the typical one-dimension rating of effectiveness is not one which corresponds to the multi-dimensional subjective assessments which practitioners make in their working world. Rowan et al. go on to suggest that it would be useful to develop grounded definitions of "effectiveness" that reflect practitioners' subjective understandings of the term.

This paper reports a study which sought specifically to

examine one source of the subjective understandings held by school superintendents of the effectiveness of administrators. The data consisted exclusively of reports written by British Columbia school superintendents, in conformity with the Act and regulations, on administrators in their districts.

These reports are clearly sensitive documents and it was only subject to impressively stringent conditions of confidentiality that I was allowed to use them. The agreement was that I would have access for a limited time to copies of these reports from which all identification of school, school district and the names and personal data of both evaluator and subject had been removed. Moreover, I was not permitted to make any further copies of the reports and was required to return all of them to the Ministry by a specified date.

While these restrictions were to some extent irksome, they were, I think, eminently sensible for a first-time project with highly sensitive documentary data. Indeed, access to the data at all was an excellent demonstration of the Ministry's willingness to assist research. The conditions did, however, impose some limitations on the project. No comparison between districts was possible, no means was available of grouping reports according to their authors, no analysis of biographical data concerning the subjects was possible. Finally, and most importantly, no follow up access to the data was possible once the allotted

time period had passed.

For my purposes, however, what I was left with was suitable. My primary interest was to find out what it is that superintendents focus on when they evaluate their subordinates. What do they seem to mean when they indicate that a particular school principal is good, bad or indifferent? A secondary interest was to determine if possible whether different facets of administrative performance or style were reported in the case of good and less good administrators respectively.

I very deliberately approached the data with as few prior conceptualizations as possible. The general guiding question was "What is in these reports?" The only initial points of specific focus beyond that were those derived from a coarse view of evaluation, namely, "How do the evaluators collect data?", "How do the evaluators indicate their criteria?", "Do the evaluators obtain their subjects' agrreement on criteria?", "Do the evaluators say where improvements are needed and, if so, how?". All other findings emerged from close scrutiny of the words written by the evaluators and from allowing those words to suggest other questions which might be asked.

In what follows the results of the exploration are presented in four sections. The first deals with the nature of the data and the superintendents' evaluations. This section draws on the complete data base of 266 reports--all the reports written on administrators in the province in

1979 and 1980. The next three sections use the data of a sample of the reports (N=77) dealing with school principals only and excluding reports on other kinds of administrator. The reason for using only a sample of the reports was that it became increasingly apparent that detailed and painstaking scrutiny of the texts of the reports was essential and the limited time for which the documents were available made this kind of analysis of all 266 reports impossible. These three sections deal respectively with the features of the schools run by the principals who were evaluated, the features of the principals themselves, and the differences between what is reported for differently rated principals. A final section presents some conclusions and speculations about the results of the exploration.

THE NATURE OF THE DATA AND THE EVALUATIONS

Two hundred and sixty-six administrators were evaluated in British Columbia in 1979 and 1980. Twenty-one of them were women; two hundred and one of them were school principals. Since the personal data concerning the subjects had been removed from the reports, it was necessary to determine what positions they held from a number of kinds of reference in the text. For this reason a small number of reports were designated as "Principal--grade level not clear". A number of central office administrators had been evaluated and these included one Director and a number of coordinators, supervisors and consultants. The composition

of the group of subjects is shown in Table 1.

The reports on these subjects are in a form which has three main components:

(1) A printed section, using the top quarter or so of the page and providing the basic biographical data about the person being evaluated. This includes his or her name, birthdate, length of time in present position, qualifications, and so on. On the reports as I received them this entire section had been removed.

(2) An anecdotal report. These anecdotal reports in the present set ranged in length from less than one page to fourteen pages.

(3) A final summary judgement by the evaluator. This is required on a seven-point scale in which 1=Excellent and 7=Poor, although some districts declined to comply with this scale, preferring to rate their staff only as "Satisfactory" or "Less than Satisfactory".

Table 2 shows the distribution of the ratings assigned by evaluators over the whole set of reports. Three points should be noted about this table. First, although the tallies shown suggest that each subject received a single rating, there were in fact twenty-eight reports which concluded with a double rating (e.g. 1-2, 5-6). In all these cases, the rating used in the display in Table 2 is either the higher of the two ratings where the lower was 5, or the

Table 1

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS BY ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION AND SEX

POSITION	SEX		TOTAL NO. OF REPORTS	%
	NO. OF MALES	NO. OF FEMALES		
DISTRICT STAFF	18	6	24	9.0
PRINCIPAL SR. SECONDARY	8	-	8	3.0
PRINCIPAL JR. SECONDARY	25	-	25	9.5
PRINCIPAL JR.-SR. SECONDARY	12	-	12	4.5
PRINCIPAL K-12	2	-	2	0.8
PRINCIPAL K-10	5	-	5	1.9
PRINCIPAL K-7	127	5	132	49.5
PRINCIPAL PRIMARY	2	5	7	2.6
PRINCIPAL, GRADE LEVEL NOT CLEAR	9	1	10	3.8
VICE PRINCIPAL, SECONDARY	22	1	23	8.6
VICE PRINCIPAL, ELEMENTARY	11	1	12	4.5
OTHER	4	2	6	2.3
TOTAL	245	21	266	100

Table 2 DISTRIBUTION OF RATINGS ASSIGNED TO SUBJECTS

RATING	No.(a)	%
1. EXCELLENT	34	12.8
2. VERY GOOD	70	26.3
3. GOOD	100	37.6
4. VERY SATISFACTORY	29	10.9
5. SATISFACTORY (a)	28	10.5
6. FAIR	4	1.5
7. POOR	1	.4

lower of the two ratings where the higher was 5. Thus "3-5" would be shown as "3" and "5-6" as "6". The second point to be kept in mind in interpreting the table is that the category "Satisfactory" (5) is used differently by different evaluators. Some use it as one of only two possible ratings (the other being "less than satisfactory"). Others use it to mean that which is suggested by its numerical value (i.e. "not as good as the top four categories, but better than the bottom two"). The tone of some of these reports could permit inferences to be drawn about what the evaluator regards as the "value" quality of the subject. Such inferences were not used in constructing Table 2, but to follow them might lead one to increase the rating of about half of these "satisfactory" reports to "very satisfactory", "good" or even "very good". Finally, it is probably not possible to assume a fine comparability between the ratings assigned. Several ratings of "3", for example, come at the end of a report whose overall tone suggests that the subject is better than "good" by comparison with what is said of others of others who score similarly.

The way subjects are distributed both by position and rating is shown in Table 3. An exhaustive analysis of the data in this table is beyond the scope of this paper, but it might be noted that "District Staff" account for 35% of all the "excellent" ratings, but also include one "less than satisfactory". Separating out secondary principals from those who enrol elementary grades shows that 53% of the former are rated "1" or "2", whereas the latter have 33.5%

Table 3

DISTRIBUTION OF RATINGS BY POSITION

	DISTRICT STAFF	PRINCIPAL, SR. SECONDARY	PRINCIPAL, JR. SECONDARY	PRINCIPAL, JR.-SR. SECONDARY	PRINCIPAL K-12	PRINCIPAL K-10	PRINCIPAL K-7	PRINCIPAL PRIMARY	PRINCIPAL, GRADE LEVEL NOT CLEAR	VICE-PRINCIPAL SECONDARY	VICE-PRINCIPAL ELEMENTARY	OTHER	
1. EXCELLENT	12	2	3	1	1		8	2		3	2		34
2. VERY GOOD	4	2	11	5	1	1	34	2	4	5	1		70
3. GOOD	6	2	8	5		2	55	1	2	11	4	4	100
4. VERY SATISFACTORY	1	1	1	1		2	13	1	1	3	4	1	29
5. SATISFACTORY		1	2				20	1	1	1	1	1	28
6. FAIR	1						2		1				4
7. POOR									1				1
	24	8	25	12	2	5	132	7	10	23	12	6	

of their number in these categories. It might be noted also that there is a reasonably "normal" distribution of ratings in those positions which include the largest number of subjects.

It will be recalled that the few points of specific focus in the first analysis of the data were those derived from asking questions about the nature of the approach to evaluation revealed in the reports (c. f. page 3 above). The findings may be briefly summarized. The majority of evaluators (68%) do not describe their method of data collection and most (81%) appear to use their own observations as a data source, rather than asking questions of others. Although more than three quarters of the evaluators (78%) do not state their criteria for evaluation, most of those who do state them appear also to make a point of discussing them with their subjects. Some 40% of the evaluators say where improvements are needed, and more than three quarters of this group specify also <u>how</u> the improvements should be made.

Before concluding this overview of the data and the nature of the evaluations, it is perhaps worth mentioning one feature that emerged, not as a result of asking a specific question, but as a result of noting that some reports contained descriptions (more or less detailed) of the context in which the subject worked. The flavour of these descriptions varied and it was quite clear that some had been included because the context appeared to provide

what might be called mitigating circumstances. About one quarter of all the reports contain material of this kind. Mitigating circumstances include a variety of factors ranging from Acts of God such as fire and flood to temporary inadequacies of the physical plant, but the most commonly mentioned are those related to the kind of staff which administrators find themselves with and the kind of community in which they must work.[1]

The evaluators then, may or may not mention mitigating circumstances, they may or may not describe their criteria and methods of data collection, they may or may not recommend how improvements are to be made. What they will certainly do, however, if they are evaluating a school principal, is to consider not only the principal and his or her performance, but also the school itself which is being administered. The next section of the paper examines what it is that evaluators appear to focus on when they consider the administrator's school as distinct from the administrator's personality, behaviour or style.

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[1] A mitigating circumstance for one evaluator may be a challenge to be met for another. The anaylsis requires some fine judgements, but there seems little doubt about the comment of one evaluator: "The staff is very experienced and considerable effort is required on the Principal's part to encourage them to participate in in-service."

THE SCHOOL AND ITS FEATURES

From the 201 reports on school principals a sample of 77 reports was randomly selected. In this sample no fewer than eighty-seven different aspects of the schools administered by the subjects were referred to. Each of these references was noted and then coded in one of seven ways:

1. Aspect has deteriorated
2. Aspect needs improvement
3. Aspect mentioned neutrally, there is no problem
4. Aspect anywhere from satisfactory to very good
5. Aspect is outstanding
6. Aspect has improved (A coding of 6 did not usually stand alone since the state which the improvement had led to was also noted)
7. Aspect noted by the evaluator as not present.

Codes 1 and 2 were taken to constitute an unfavourable mention. Codes 3, 4 and 5 were regarded as favourable mentions. A code of 6 was regarded as favourable or unfavourable depending on its state after the improvement noted.

The frequency of mention of any particular aspect may be seen as one measure of the extent to which that aspect provides a commonly held focus for superintendents across the province. Table 4 displays those aspects (referred to as "items" in the table) which were most frequently mentioned. Only two aspects of the school featured in more than half of the sample reports, "Supervision of Teaching Staff" and

"Communication with Parents". Three aspects were found to be mentioned in forty to fifty per cent of the reports, "Statement of School Philosophy", "Communication with Community", and "Overall Educational Climate or Tone". The remaining eighty-two aspects of the schools were each referred to in fewer that 40% of the reports.

A classification of the eighty-seven different aspects was made which resulted in six categories:

1. Physical Plant and its Use
2. Routines and Procedures
3. The Programme and its Organization
4. The Staff
5. Community Relations
6. District Relations

Category 3 (The Programme and its Organization) was broadly defined to include extra curricular activities and other items which might be said to contribute to the overall educational climate of the school.

Just as the frequency of mention of individual aspects of the school could be regarded as constituting a measure of the extent to which they provided a common focus for superintendents, so the number of reports in which the elements of each of the six categories were mentioned might be seen as a measure of the salience for evaluators of each category. By this measure The Programme and its Organization is the most salient of the dimensions, being referred to by one or more of its elements in 86% of the reports in the

Table 4

FREQUENCY OF MENTION OF MOST MENTIONED SINGLE ITEMS

MENTIONED IN	NO. OF ITEMS	DETAILS
>50% - <60% OF REPORTS (N = 78)	2	SUPERVISION OF TEACHING STAFF COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS
>40% - <50% OF REPORTS	3	STATEMENT OF SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITY OVERALL EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE OR TONE
>30% - <40% OF REPORTS	4	
>20% - <30% OF REPORTS	16	
>10% - <20% OF REPORTS	28	
>5% - <10% OF REPORTS	24	
<5% OF REPORTS	10	
	87	

sample. Seventy-eight per cent of the reports refer to Routines and Procedures , Staff , and Community Relations . Less salient is Physical Plant (44% of the reports), and relatively infrequent is mention of District Relations (14% of the reports).

A different measure of the salience of dimensions for the evaluators is provided by an examination of the frequency with which elements in the categories are mentioned. Columns 4 and 5 of Table 5 show the number of mentions of items in each category and the rank order of categories on this measure. By this measure also, The Programme and its Organization is dominant. In examining the ranks of the categories it is perhaps worth remembering that, although Staff ranks only fourth here, the item "Supervision of Teaching Staff" was the single most frequently mentioned item. It will also be recalled that items from The Programme and its Organization and Community Relations were the only other ones to be mentioned in over 40% of the sample.

Columns 2 and 3 of the table show the number of favourable and unfavourable mentions respectively in each category. The last column of the table shows the ratio of favourable to unfavourable mentions. Thus, for every unfavourable mention in the area of Community Relations, there are more than twenty-three favourable mentions, whereas for every unfavourable mention in Programme and its Organization there are only slightly over eleven favourable

Table 5

ASPECTS OF SCHOOL: FREQUENCY OF FAVOURABLE AND UNFAVOURABLE MENTION

ASPECT	NO UNFAVOURABLE MENTIONS	NO FAVOURABLE MENTIONS	TOTAL MENTIONS	RANK	RATIO FAV: UNFAV.
PHYSICAL PLANT	3	57	60	5	19.0
ROUTINES & PROCEDURES	17	276	293	2	16.2
PROGRAM & ITS ORGANIZATION	32	354	386	1	11.1
STAFF	13	129	142	4	9.9
COMMUNITY RELATIONS	7	165	172	3	23.6
DISTRICT RELATIONS	1	11	12	6	11.6

ones. The items concerned with Staff clearly call forth a greater proportion of unfavourable mentions than those of any other category.

The finding that evaluators of principals consider not only the principal but also the school which he or she runs is not at all surprising (indeed, to have found otherwise would have been strange), but what seems to emerge from this analysis is that certain aspects of the school receive more attention than others. The apparent salience in this regard of The Programme and its Organization may be in part a function of the broad definition of this category (which resulted in more elements of the school being included in it than in any other category), but it also reflects the common sense notion that what is important to the evaluator is the way the principal's school does what it is supposed to do. What also emerges from this analysis is that some kinds of things which go on in the school are more likely than others to make a favourable impression on the evaluator. Thus the ratio of 23.6:1 for favourable:unfavourable mentions of items in the area of Community Relations seems to suggest that the principal who pays attention to these relations stands a good chance of being commended for it. The work he or she does with regard to Staff, however, comes in for much more critical appraisal.

THE PRINCIPAL: ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS

It appears from the reports examined that evaluators consider the personal attributes of principals, including the way they work, as well as what they do. The following paragraphs discuss first the way in which the background and the person of the principal are described and second, the kind of actions which are referred to by the evaluators.

The Principal: The Person

Professional background . Several aspects of the principal's professional background stand an equal chance of being mentioned or not mentioned. Thus, previous experience, professional development activities and professional activities (such as serving on committees) are mentioned in about one half of the reports and not mentioned in the other half. Whether or not any one of them is mentioned seems to depend more on the inclination of the evaluator than on anything else. Three quarters of the reports do mention the number of years the subject has been in his or her present position and over eighty per cent of the reports do not mention the kind of professional development acquired through university coursework--a finding consistent with other work which has suggested that practitioners have often viewed formal training as inadequate in the preparation of school administrators (Pitner, 1982).

One particular kind of attribute began to stand out as the reports were read in more and more depth. Its salience

emerged not because of the frequency of its mention, but because of the way it was mentioned. It is far from being a clear-cut attribute, and a far from clear-cut label was coined for it. The name chosen was Personal-Professional Awareness and Competence .

For a statement in the reports to be classified as a mention of Personal-Professional Awareness and competence, it had to be one which was not made solely with reference to what the principal did in his or her school. It was a mention which either stated or clearly implied that the particular area of awareness or competence was a professional interest which went beyond the subject's working context and formed part of his or her intellectual life. Frequently, but not always, it appears to be associated with the subject's being in demand as a resource person.

This Personal-Professional Awareness and Competence is mentioned in twenty-three of the seventy-seven sample reports, and two things in particular are interesting about it: first, it seems to be associated in some way with the rating of the principal and, second, it seems to consist of three separate elements which form a hierarchy, if not a scale. The three elements are shown in Table 6, which also shows the number of times each element is mentioned in the reports. The hierarchical flavour of the elements is given by the movement from awareness and concern about philosophy, values and one's purpose in life, through an interest and

Table 6

TYPES OF PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS AND COMPETENCE

A	HAVING A PHILOSOPHY, VALUES, SENSE OF PURPOSE IN LIFE	6 Mentions
B	HAVING PERSONAL INTEREST AND EXPERTISE IN A PARTICULAR CULTURAL OR BROADLY EDUCATIONAL DOMAIN	9 Mentions
C	HAVING OUTSTANDING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMES EITHER IN GENERAL OR IN A PARTICULAR AREA	14 Mentions

expertise in a particular cultural domain (for example, music, fine arts), to an awareness and deep interest in a particularly educational domain (such as the education of the gifted or the theory of curriculum). It is worth noting that the frequency of mention increases as one moves "down" the hierarchy. The frequency of mention of each of the elements exceeds the number of reports in which the variable is mentioned. It is clear, therefore, that more than one of the elements can be mentioned for any given principal. An analysis of these multiple references suggests that a relationship exists between the mention of this variable and the rating given to the principal for whom it is mentioned. Further discussion of this analysis is given below in the section on the differences between differently rated principals.

The description of the principal . As one might expect, the reports contain a fair number of descriptors--adjectives and adjectival phrases about the principals. In the sample of 77 reports were 238 adjectives or adjectival phrases directly describing the subject of the report. For purposes of the analysis each of these words or phrases was written on a separate card, together with a note of the number of times it was used. The classification of these cards proved a difficult and time-consuming task which was finally accomplished only by thinking beyond the adjective to the characteristic which it described. This yielded a total of twenty-eight different characteristics which, in

turn, could fairly easily be grouped in five dimensions.

Table 7 summarizes the results of the classification. Its last column shows examples of the descriptors used (in this case the ones most frequently used for each characteristic). The columns immediately preceding these examples show the number of different descriptors and the total number of uses of all the descriptors for each characteristic. For example, the adjectives "warm" and "friendly" are the two most frequently used of eighteen different words or phrases describing the characteristic of attractiveness. Several of these words or phrases are used more than once in the reports and the total number of times one or other of them is used is 61. The left hand column of the table shows the dimensions into which all twenty-eight characteristics can be grouped.

The detailed discussion of the data in Table 7 is of less interest than three "measures" which can be derived from it. These three measures enable one to examine (a) the complexity of each dimension, (b) the salience of each dimension as a focus for those who were evaluating the subjects of the reports, and (c) the degree of similarity among evaluators in choosing what qualities to describe. Table 8 shows the results of constructing these measures. Referring only to the dimensions described, the top half of Table 8 summarizes columns 3 and 4 of Table 7 and adds a column showing the average number of uses of each descriptor (the total number of uses divided by the number of

Table 7

ANALYSIS OF ADJECTIVES OR ADJECTIVAL PHRASES USED

DIMENSION DESCRIBED	CHARACTERISTIC DESCRIBED	NO. OF DESCR-IPTORS	NO. OF USES OF ALL DESCR-IPTORS	MOST FREQUENTLY USED DESCRIPTOR(S)
PERSONALITY AND MANNER	ATTRACTIVENESS	18	61	WARM, FRIENDLY
	SOUND SELF CONCEPT	6	24	CONFIDENT
	GENERAL IMPRESSION MADE	13	32	NEATLY GROOMED, HAS GOOD SPEAKING VOICE
	FORMALITY	4	4	DIGNIFIED, FORMAL
	STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS	5	16	CANDID, DIRECT
	ARTICULATENESS	2	5	ARTICULATE
	LEVEL-HEADEDNESS	11	17	CALM
	UNOBTRUSIVENESS	6	30	QUIET, LOW KEY
	ASSERTIVENESS	12	30	FORTHRIGHT
VALUES	ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR	9	60	FAIR
ABILITIES	CREATIVITY	11	27	CREATIVE, CONSTRUCTIVE
	REASONING & JUDGEMENT	19	48	HAS GOOD JUDGEMENT, INTELLIGENT
	CAPABILITY AT WORK	9	49	CAPABLE, EFFICIENT
APPROACH TO WORK	INDUSTRY	18	155	DEDICATED, HARDWORKING
	COURAGE	4	10	COURAGEOUS
	MATURE PROFESSIONALISM	11	29	PROFESSIONAL, WISE, RESPONSIBLE
	ATTENTION TO DETAIL	4	4	METICULOUS
	SENSE OF REALITY	6	12	PRACTICAL, HAS COMMON SENSE
	INVOLVEMENT OUT OF PERSONAL INTEREST	7	23	INTERESTED, INVOLVED
	SCHOLARLINESS	1	1	SCHOLARLY
	VIGOUR OF APPROACH	9	18	DECISIVE, BUSINESS-LIKE
RELATIONS WITH OTHERS	ENCOURAGEMENT & SUPPORT	4	22	SUPPORTIVE
	CONSIDERATENESS	30	151	COOPERATIVE, PATIENT, UNDERSTANDING
	WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT	5	35	OPEN, FLEXIBLE
	GIVING DEFINITE DIRECTION	7	43	POSITIVE, FIRM
	FACILITATION	1	1	IS A FACILITATOR
	VISIBILITY	1	19	VISIBLE
	GENERATION OF TRUST	5	19	CONSISTENT, RELIABLE
		238	945	

descriptors in each dimension).

The complexity of each dimension may be inferred from the number of descriptors used for the characteristics in it--the more descriptors, the more complex the dimension. Irrespective of the complexity of the dimensions, the extent to which each is referred to in the reports (and hence its salience for the evaluators as something to be noted) may be gauged by the total number of times it is mentioned. This statistic is given by the total number of uses of all descriptors. Finally, if we assume that when two or more evaluators use a particular word, they mean the same thing by it, then a calculation of the number of times each descriptor is used may be taken as a rough measure of the degree to which the different evaluators make similar judgements about what qualities in principals are to be noted.

The results of applying these measures are shown in the lower half of Table 8. The most complex dimensions appear to be "Personality and Manner" and "Approach to Work", followed fairly closely by "Relations with Others"--a finding consistent with the view that there is no one best type of administrator or style of administration. Less complex is "Abilities"--the evaluators seem to have a sense of what kind of abilities (creativity, reasoning and judgement and capableness) are worth noting in a principal. Least complex of all for the writers of these reports is the dimension of "Values" in which ethical behaviour is the only

Table 8

ANALYSIS OF DIMENSIONS DESCRIBED BY THE ADJECTIVES OR ADJECTIVAL PHRASES USED IN THE REPORTS

DIMENSION DESCRIBED	NO. OF DESCR-IPTORS	RANK	NO.OF USES ALL DESCR-IPTORS	RANK	AVERAGE NO. USES EACH DESCR-IPTOR	RANK
PERSONALITY & MANNER	77	1	219	3	2.84	5
VALUES	9	5	60	5	6.67	1
ABILITIES	39	4	124	4	3.18	4
APPROACH TO WORK	60	2	252	2	4.2	3
RELATIONS WITH OTHERS	53	3	290	1	5.48	2

CONTRASTING RESULTS OF THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DEGREE TO WHICH EACH DIMENSION IS REFERRED TO

RANK	COMPLEXITY OF EACH DIMENSION (NO.OF DESCR-IPTORS)	IMPORTANCE OF EACH DIMENSION AS A CRITERION (NO. OF USES OF ALL DESCRIPTORS)	DEGREE OF SIMILARITY IN JUDGING WHAT QUALITIES ARE TO BE NOTED (AVERAGE NO.OF USES OF EACH DESCRIPTOR)
1	PERSONALITY & MANNER	RELATIONS WITH OTHERS	VALUES
2	APPROACH TO WORK	APPROACH TO WORK	REL'NS WITH OTHERS
3	RELATIONS WITH OTHERS	PERSONALITY & MANNER	APPROACH TO WORK
4	ABILITIES	ABILITIES	ABILITIES
5	VALUES	VALUES	PERSONALITY & MANNER

characteristic described, and that by only nine different descriptors.

"Values" is not only the least complex dimension emerging from these reports, it is also the least salient. What is clearly most salient for these evaluators as something to be judged is "Relations with Others", with "Approach to Work" as a close second. "Personality and Manner" seems reasonably important, but "Abilities" are referred to far less frequently.

The greatest degree of similarity among evaluators in judging what qualities are to be noted is in the area of "Values", in which each descriptor is used more than six times. "Relations with Others" also scores high on this measure, largely because of the almost ubiquitous use of words describing considerateness. A similarly widespread use of words describing industriousness results in the third place ranking of "Approach to Work" in this analysis, whereas the relatively low score of "Abilities" and "Personality and Manner" reflect the variety of terms used for them.

Finally, it is worth noting that the least salient dimensions ("Values", "Abilities" and "Personality and Manner") refer to the person of the principal, and the most salient ("Approach to Work" and "Relations with Others") refer to the principal at work. If these descriptions tell us in some sense <u>how</u> principals do what they do, a different kind of data tells us <u>what</u> it is that they do.

<u>The Actions of the Principals</u>

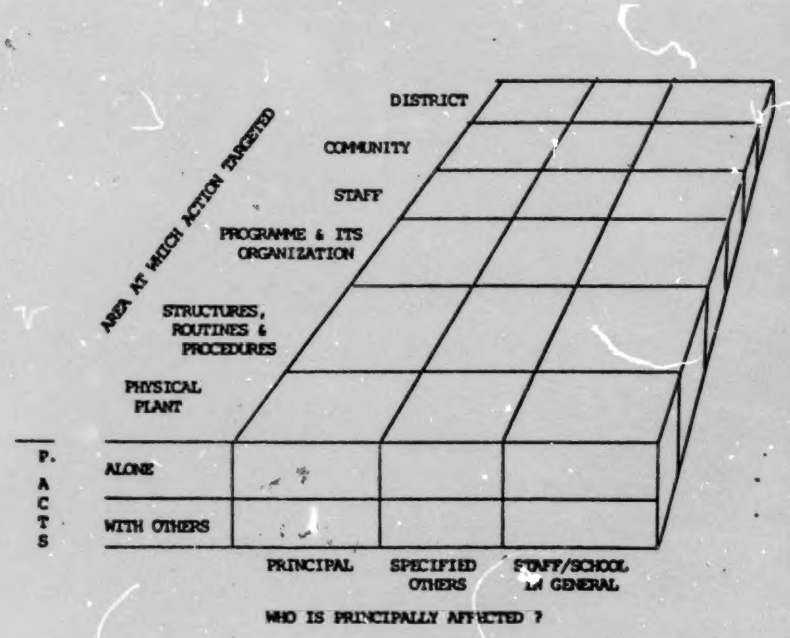
Two hundred and ninety actions by principals were described in the sample reports. The examination and classification of this large number and variety of actions led to the construction of a four-dimensional framework for the analysis. Since the framework is important for the presentation and interpretation of the results, its construction is decribed in detail in the following paragraphs. The results of the analysis are presented under a second sub-heading.

<u>The classification of reported actions</u> . A first sort of the 290 actions described in the reports yielded twenty-one categories, but this result was not entirely satisfactory--there seemed to be too many categories and there was a sense that actions were being intuitively assigned to categories which could not be easily defined. A second attempt gave thirteen categories but did nothing to dispel the impression that there was a fuzziness in exactly what aspects of each action were being given priority as it was assigned to a category.

Accordingly, the task was approached in a different way by trying to be specific about which aspects of each action were being revealed by the words in the description. This led to the clear identification of four elements in most actions. The first resulted from the strong impression given by the reports that principals were often commended for acting in consultation with others. For this reason, the

first element considered was Who Acts? For this element a two-part classification was used: The principal acts alone or the principal acts with someone else. A second observation about the reported actions was that different people were chiefly affected by them. Thus a second element became the answer to the question, "Who is chiefly affected?" A three-part classification was used here: the action chiefly affects the principal him or herself, the action chiefly affects specified others (e.g. parents, department heads, a particular committee), the action chiefly affects the staff or the school in general. Third, the actions were directed at different parts of the school operation, thus the third element was discerned by asking "At what area is the action targeted?" . For the classification of actions on this dimension the six areas of school operation already used in the analysis of the features of the school were used (c.f. Page 10 above). Finally, the actions differed in kind, some were actions designed to provide a sense of direction, for example, while others were the kind of actions needed to cope with day to day occurrences. In order to distinguish different kinds of action, a four-part classification of organizational actions was taken from Handy (1976:198). This classification distinguishes between four kinds of action: steady state, innovative or developmental, breakdown or crisis (expanded in this analysis to include actions solving particular one-time only problems of a serious nature) and actions making policy or establishing direction.

Figure 1. The Framework for the Analysis of Reported Actions



THIS MATRIX APPLICABLE TO EACH OF FOUR KINDS OF ACTION:

ACTIONS WHICH ARE REGULAR, STEADY STATE
ACTIONS WHICH ARE INNOVATIVE, DEVELOPMENTAL
ACTIONS WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO SOLVE PARTICULAR CRISES OR PROBLEMS
ACTIONS WHICH SET POLICY OR ESTABLISH DIRECTION

Figure 1 shows the matrix constructed to serve as the framework for analysis. The combination of all four elements in the framework yields 4 x 36 cells. To draw these in a different way, as in Figure 2, permits one easily to give a unique designation to each cell. Thus "D12" designates actions which are of an innovative or developmental kind, which are performed by the principal alone, targeted at the area of staff and chiefly affect the staff or the school in general. Such an action might be "Developed a new system of teacher supervision".

Following the construction of this framework, each reported action was re-examined to see if it could be classified in this way. Table 9 shows the results of this re-examination. Two hundred and seventy of the reported actions were fully classifiable by the four dimensions of the framework. Sixteen could be partly classified and four could not be classified at all. What made these twenty actions not amenable to full classification was a lack of information about the action in the way it was reported. The distribution of the 270 classifiable actions for each of the four elements of the framework is shown in the lower part of Table 9. Given the apparent utility of the framework in distinguishing between different actions, it was used for their further analysis.

Figure 2. Grid Framework for Analysis of Reported Actions

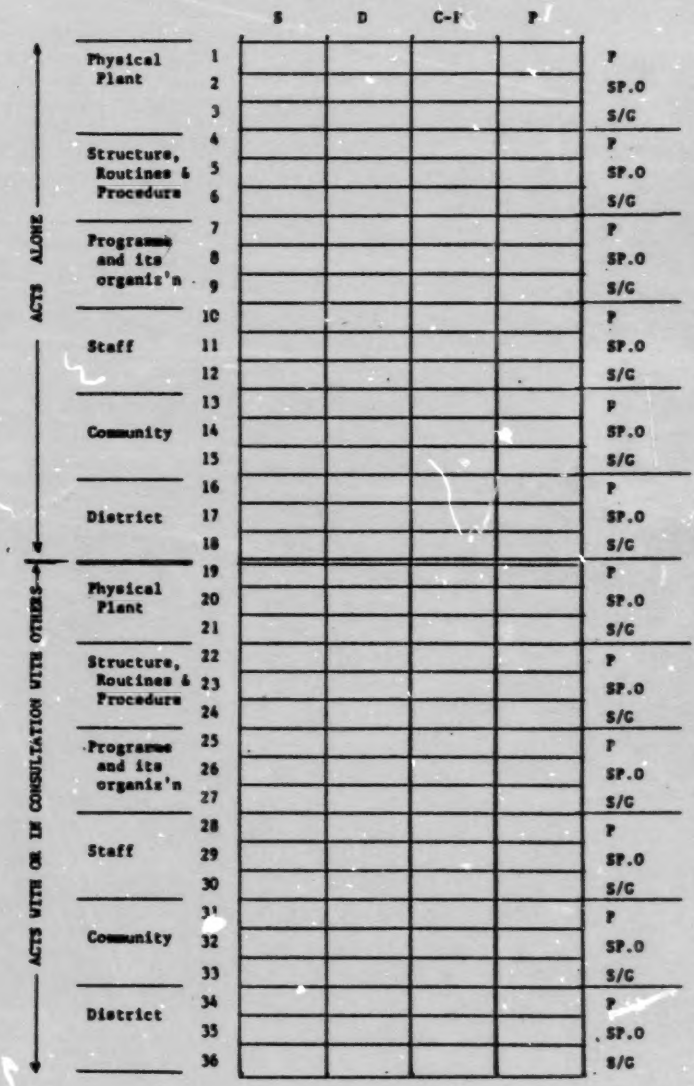

S
D
C-F
P
ACTS ALONE
ACTS WITH OR IN CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS
Physical Plant
Structure, Routines & Procedure
Programme and its organiz'n
Staff
Community
District
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36
P
SP.O
S/G

Table 9

REPORTED ACTIONS OF PRINCIPALS

ACTIONS REPORTED AND CLASSIFIABLE ON FOUR DIMENSIONS	270
ACTIONS REPORTED AND PARTLY CLASSIFIABLE	16
ACTIONS REPORTED IN TOO LITTLE DETAIL TO PERMIT CLASSIFICATION	4

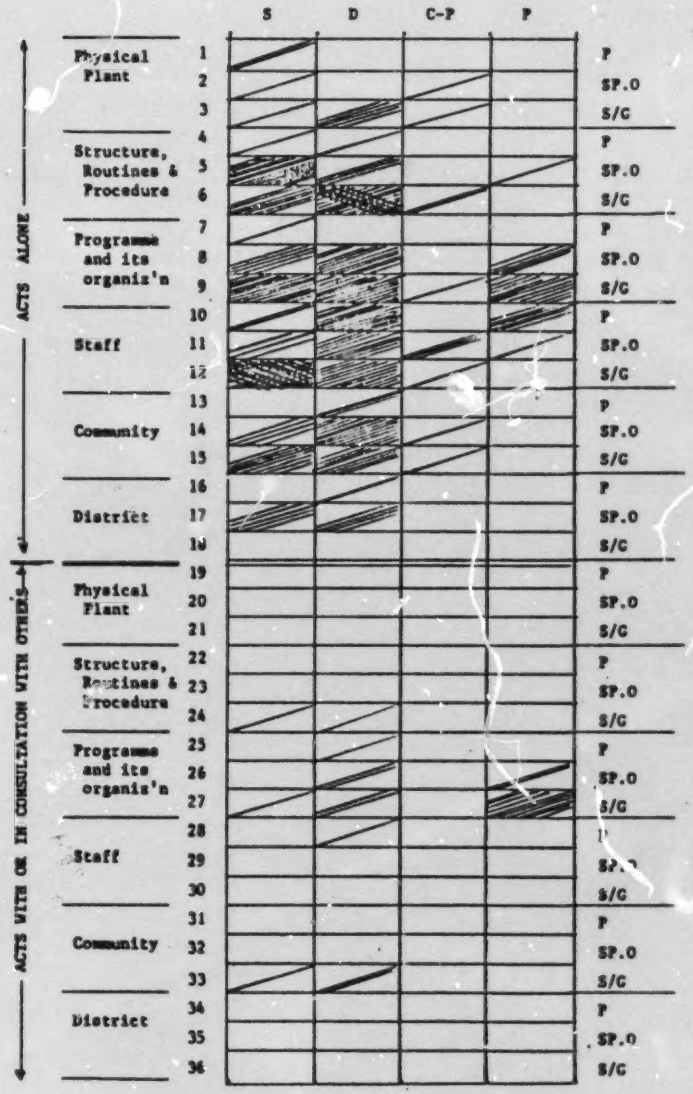
DISTRIBUTION IN EACH CATEGORY OF CLASSIFIABLE REPORTED ACTIONS

ACTORS		
PRINCIPAL ALONE	245	(90.7%)
PRINCIPAL WITH OTHERS	25	(9.3%)
AREA TO WHICH ACTION TARGETED		
PHYSICAL PLANT	11	(4.1%)
STRUCTURES, ROUTINES & PROCEDURES	51	(18.9%)
PROGRAMME & ITS ORGANIZATION	84	(31.1%)
STAFF	74	(27.4%)
COMMUNITY	40	(14.8%)
DISTRICT	10	(3.7%)
THOSE CHIEFLY AFFECTED		
PRINCIPAL HIM OR HERSELF	30	(11.1%)
SPECIFIED OTHERS	89	(33.0%)
STAFF OR SCHOOL IN GENERAL	151	(55.9%)
KIND OF ACTION		
STEADY STATE	95	(35.2%)
INNOVATIVE/DEVELOPMENTAL	126	(46.7%)
CRISIS/PROBLEM SOLUTION	11	(4.1%)
POLICY/DIRECTION SETTING	38	(14.0%)

The reported actions. An overall view of what kind of actions are described in the sample reports is displayed graphically in Figure 3. One diagonal line in the figure represents one reported action. Thus, the darkest cells in the figure are the ones in which the greatest number of actions lie. Several observations may be made about this overall display. It is clear that very few reported actions were taken by the principal acting with others, but that more than half of those that were fell into the category of policy or direction establishing actions. It seems, however, that not all policy is established by principals acting with their colleagues--a greater number of actions of the same kind is shown in cell P9 in which the principal acts alone. Also noticeable is the relative absence of actions in the crisis/breakdown/problem solving category and, with one exception, in the class of actions of all kinds affecting chiefly the principal him or herself. This one exception (cell D10) is probably important, containing as it does, actions by which the principal sets up his or her system of staff supervision.

The cells which contain more actions than any others are S12, D6, S9 and D9. Table 10 shows the number of reported actions in each of these cells and shows examples of what kinds of action they are. While the table is for the most part self explanatory, it is perhaps worth noting that the tense of the verb used in describing the action is a key feature in distinguishing between steady state and innovative or developmental activities. Thus the example

Figure 3. Distribution of Reported Actions



shown in Table 10 for an S12 activity ("Carries out a 'regular and thoroughly developed schedule of staff supervision") may be contrasted with the example given earlier of a D12 activity ("Developed a new system of teacher supervision"). This distinction, as will be seen below, becomes interesting in interpreting the results for differently rated principals.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REPORTS OF DIFFERENTLY RATED PRINCIPALS

Because the reports in all cases conclude with a rating of the subject, it is possible to examine whether or not there are differences in the way differently rated principals are evaluated. Three analyses yield interesting results. They concern (1) the unsuccessful principal, (2) the actions of successful principals and (3) the dimension of personal-professional awareness and competence.

The Unsuccessful Principal

Little reference appears to be made in the school effectiveness literature to poor or unsuccessful principals--perhaps because respondents in most research projects are reticent about identifying such administrators. It is noteworthy also that Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) in their comprehensive review of a large number of studies

Table 10

MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED ACTIVITY CATEGORIES

CATEGORY	NO. OF REPORTED ACTIONS	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITY
S12	23	P. ALONE AREA:STAFF AFFECTING ST/SCH IN GENERAL	CARRIES OUT A REGULAR AND THOROUGHLY DEVELOPED SCHEDULE OF STAFF SUPERVISION PROVIDES GUIDANCE FOR IN-SERVICE ACTIVITIES OF STAFF
D 6	20	P. ALONE AREA: STRUCT, ROUTINES,PR. AFFECTING ST/SCH IN GENERAL	DESIGNED AND PRODUCED A SCHOOL MANUAL DEVELOPED GOOD NEW ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES INTRODUCED NEW ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES
S 9	15	P. ALONE AREA: PROG & ORGANIZATION AFFECTING ST/SCH IN GENERAL	COORDINATES SUPPORT SERVICES CAREFULLY MONITORS GRADING & EVALUATION PROCEDURES ENCOURAGES STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOL
D 9	15	P. ALONE AREA: PROG & ORGANIZATION AFFECTING ST/SCH IN GENERAL	INTRODUCED NEW EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ESTABLISHED POLICY & PROCEDURES FOR PUPIL ASSIGNMENT ASKED THE STAFF TO EXAMINE PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN IN DIFFICULTY

are able to distinguish only between "effective" principals and "typical" or "modestly effective" principals. In the present data five subjects were rated as "6" or "7" ("fair" and "poor" respectively). Four of these five were school principals.

The reports on these unsuccessful principals do not differ markedly from other reports in the attention they give to the subjects' schools, but they do differ in two other repects: they are longer (see Table 11 below) and rather than describing the actions of the principals they describe the absence of actions. Subject 16, for example, has a report which notes that he or she "did not know . . , is ignorant of . . , makes little use of . . , is not able to show . . , fails to . . , acts without . . ." Subject 37 "is unaware of . . , neglects . . , makes little attempt to. ." Subject 69 "is not successful in . . , cannot persuade the staff to. . , has not . . , needs to . . , has not provided . . " And subject 120 "must learn to . . , needs to . . , has not involved himself in . . ." The words used in the report on the only unsuccessful central office administrator are similar. This person "has not. . , does not . . , needs to . . , appears not willing to . . , is not involved in . .". Where actions are reprted for these subjects, they serve generally to reinforce the dominant impression of lack of action: the subject "acts without . . " or "makes inappropriate delegations of . . " Another subject spends long hours in the school, but this serves as an indication not of his industry but of the apparent fact

that he has failed to organize his priorities.

Although the number of principals rated unsuccessful is small, the tone of the reports about them is clearly different from that found in the reports on their more successful colleagues. On the basis of what is in those reports, it seems likely that a case can be made for the assertion that principals who fail do so by omission rather than by commission.

The Actions of Successful and Very Successful Principals

The analysis of the actions reported by the evaluators was extended so as to investigate whether different sorts of actions were reported in the case of very successful principals and reasonably successful principals. The reports of those principals who were rated "1" or "2" ("Excellent" or "Very Good") were examined separately from those of principals rated "3", "4" and "5". The decision to split the sample in this way resulted partly from the fact that there were only five principals rated in the "Excellent" category--too few to permit reasonably valid comparison. The legitimacy of the decision, however, received striking confirmation from an unexpected finding concerning the length of the reports and the frequency with which actions were mentioned in them.

The frequency of mention of actions. For the purpose of making some kinds of between-group comparison it was

important to know whether a high frequency of mention was the result simply of the length of reports. Accordingly, an analysis was made of the average length of reports in each of the seven rating categories and the average number of actions reported in them.

Table 11 shows the results of this analysis. While the average length of reports shows a curvilinear distribution over the rating categories, the number of reported actions per report (or per report-page) declines as one moves from rating category "1" to rating category "5". What is particularly noticeable is the marked drop in the frequency of actions being mentioned between rating categories "2" and "3"--in contrast to the average page length which remains almost the same in these two categories. This finding seemed to provide good confirmation of the legitimacy of splitting the sample between categories "2" and "3".

For the purposes of comparative analysis between groups, these findings also suggest that the frequency with which actions are mentioned needs to be interpreted carefully. The data do, however, raise the interesting question of why evaluators appear to report progressively fewer actions as they report progressively lower ratings.

The reported actions. It will be recalled that Table 10 showed the most frequently mentioned types of activity across all reports of principals rated "satisfactory" or better. Table 12 shows the results of an identical analysis

Table 11

REPORTED ACTIONS OF PRINCIPALS

NUMBER OF REPORTED ACTIONS AND LENGTH OF REPORTS FOR EACH OF THE SEVEN RATING CATEGORIES

RATING	NO. OF PRINC-IPALS	AVERAGE LENGTH OF REPORTS (PAGES) (a)	NO. OF CLASSIFIABLE REPORTED ACTIONS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF REPORTED CLASSIFIABLE ACTIONS	
				PER REPORT	PER PAGE
1	5	5.4	27	5.4	1.0
2	20	5.4	101	5.1	0.9
3	28	5.3	101	3.6	0.7
4	8	3.4	17	2.1	0.6
5	12	4.6	24	2.0	0.4
6	3	6.0	-	-	-
7	1	10.0	-	-	-

Notes: (a) Page lengths calculated by using as a measure one page = approx 300 words

performed separately for each of the two groups of principals. It is clear that the most frequently mentioned activities in one group are quite different from those in the other. The principals rated "1" and "2" have reports which refer most frequently to steady state kinds of activity, while those rated "3", "4" and "5" bring mention of innovative or developmental activities. Moreover, the most frequently mentioned kinds of activity for the top rated principals concern teacher supervision and staff guidance, activities which are in second and third place for the second group of principals. Activities having to do with structures, routines and procedures are the most frequently mentioned for the second group and, although such activities are frequently mentioned for the top group, they are in this latter case activities directed at specified others rather than at the staff or school in general. These different focuses are reversed in the case of the fourth most frequent type of activity in both groups--activities in the area of community relations.

Statistically, the significant differences between the kinds of action most frequently reported for each of the two groups lie predominantly in the kind of action referred to (steady state and innovative or developmental) and secondarily in the area to which the action is targeted. Table 13 shows the distribution of reported actions for each of the groups. The details of the table are perhaps more revealing than is the simple designation of the dimensions in which the statistically significant differences lie. The

Table 12 MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED ACTIVITY CATEGORIES FOR PRINCIPALS RATED "1" OR "2" AND "3", "4" OR "5" RESPECTIVELY

RANK	FOR PRINCIPALS RATED "1" OR "2"		FOR PRINCIPALS RATED "3" "4" OR "5"	
	CATEGORY	NO. MENTIONS	CATEGORY	NO. MENTIONS
1	S 12	19	D 6	13
2	S 5	11	D 10	11
3	S 9	11	D 12	11
4	S 15	8	D 14	11

Table 13 DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTED ACTIONS IN EACH OF THREE CATEGORIES FOR TWO GROUPS OF PRINCIPALS

	NUMBER REPORTED FOR P'S RATED 1 OR 2	NUMBER REPORTED FOR P'S RATED 3, 4 OR 5
AREA TO WHICH ACTION TARGETED **		
PHYSICAL PLANT	-	11
STRUCTURES, ROUTINES & PROCEDURES	27	24
PROGRAMME & ITS ORG'N	41	43
STAFF	35	39
COMMUNITY	18	22
DISTRICT	7	3
THOSE CHIEFLY AFFECTED *		
PRINCIPAL HIM OR HERSELF	9	21
SPECIFIED OTHERS	47	42
STAFF OR SCHOOL IN GENERAL	72	79
KIND OF ACTION ***		
STEADY STATE	73	22
INNOVATIVE/DEVELOPMENTAL	38	88
CRISIS/PROBLEM SOLUTION	1	10
POLICY/DIRECTION SETTING	16	22

* Chi square test yields $p \leq .10$
** Chi square test yields $p \leq .05$
*** Chi square test yields $p \leq .001$

principals rated "1" or "2" evoke no mention of actions in the area of physical plant, unlike their less highly rated colleagues, but they appear to be noticed much more for what they do in the area of district relations. It is also noticeable that a larger proportion of the actions reported for the second group than for the top group are actions which chiefly affect the principal him or herself. It is tempting to see these differences as the differences between the principal who has "arrived" and the one who is still "trying to make it". From such a perspective, the principals rated "3" "4" or "5" are those who have to get their own routines and procedures in order, who have to initiate new practices in order to improve a less than satisfactory situation. Their more successful peers by contrast need only to maintain the high quality of their operation. Such an explanation is not wholly satisfactory, however, and we shall return to the question of how to interpret the findings in the last section of the paper.

Personal-Professional Awareness and Competence

The variable called personal-professional awareness and competence emerged because of its distinctiveness and not because of the frequency of its mention. The earlier discussion of the variable (page 14 above) noted that it seemed to consist of three elements and that it seemed to discriminate between principals receiving different ratings. Table 14 shows the number of mentions of the variable across rating categories. It is to be noted here that the top two

Table 14

MENTION OF PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS & COMPETENCE AND RATING OF SUBJECTS

	RATINGS													
	1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
MENTION OF P-P A & C	3	60	9	45	6	21	1	12	4	33	0		0	
NO SUCH MENTION	2	40	11	55	22	79	7	88	8	66	3		1	
TOTALS (N=76)	5		20		28		8		12		3		1	

rating categories are the ones in which higher proportions of subjects receive a mention of this variable than is the case in the lower rating categories. The analysis can be expanded, however, by considering the separate elements of the variable. These elements were noted in Table 6 (page 14) and it was also noted that more than one element could be mentioned in one report. Table 15 shows how the mentions of each element are distributed across the rating categories and also into which rating categories fall those reports which mention more than one of the three elements. It is clear from the table that as the mention of elements moves from element A to element C (from philosophy, values, sense of purpose in life to outstanding professional knowledge in a particular area), so the entries move down the rating categories. It is also the case that the reports on principals rated "1" and "2" are the only ones which include mention of more than one of the three elements.

Perhaps more clearly than any other variable, it is this personal-professional awareness and competence which seems to distinguish between the excellent or very good principals and the rest. Again, however, this conclusion may be facile and, like the other findings of the study, needs to be discussed in the light of the particular nature of the data.

Table 15

DISTRIBUTION OF MENTIONS OF EACH OF THREE TYPES OF PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS AND COMPETENCE BY RATING OF SUBJECTS

RATING	NO. OF SUBJECTS WITH MENTION	TYPE A No.	TYPE A %	TYPE B No.	TYPE B %	TYPE C No.	TYPE C %	COMBINATIONS OF TYPES A ALONE	B ALONE	C ALONE	A + B	A + C	B + C	NO. OF S'S HAVING MORE THAN ONE TYPE No.	%
1	3	3	100	1	33	1	33	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	66
2	9	2	22	4	44	6	66	1	1	4	1	1	2	3	33
3	6	1	16	1	16	4	66	1	1	4	1	1	1	0	
4	1	1		1		1	100	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	
5	4	1		3	75	1	25	1	3	1	1	1	1	0	
6	1	1		1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1	0	
7	1	1		1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1	0	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

One way to view the foregoing analyses is to see them as presenting a picture of school principals which seems in general to amplify rather than contradict existing findings about effective principals and their schools. One rereads the reviews of Hemphill et al. (1962), Gross and Herriott (1965), Bossert et al. (1982) and Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) in the light of the present findings and one finds oneself easily nodding agreement. But to attempt a systematic, thoughtful, point by point comparison of these findings with those of others is to come face to face with two questions about comparability.

The first is the problem posed by the existence of different classification schemes. In order to make a definitive statement about the congruence between the present findings concerning the actions of principals and the comparable material in Leithwood and Montgomery's work, one would need to reexamine each of the 290 actions mentioned in the present reports and reclassify them in terms of the thirteen sub-dimensions and the twenty-three sub-sub dimensions used by those authors. Conversely, if one wanted to explore the unusual and perhaps disturbing finding in the present study that the best principals are not reported to take innovative actions as frequently as the more "modestly effective" principals, then the Leithwood and Montgomery data would have to be subjected to analysis by

the present framework.

The second problem is more subtle, less easily recognized, and yet, of major importance. It emerges from the realization that in discussing the present findings one is constantly tempted to see them as describing principals and what they do. In reality, this is not what the data describe at all. What they describe is what superintendents say about principals and how superintendents judge principals.

In one sense, of course, this provides exactly what Rowan et al. (1983) have called for in suggesting the need for grounded definitions of excellence which reflect practitioners' understandings of the term. But will the two be comparable? Is the soil in which the practitioners' understandings are grounded the same as the earth from which the research-generated findings spring? Before that question is dismissed as silly, it is worth considering two other questions: (1) For whom were the present reports written? And (2) Are superintendents more rational than most of us when they make evaluations in the course of their daily work?

The reports are not written for wide consumption. Three, possibly four copies will be made of most of them: a copy is lodged with the Ministry, a copy is often given to Scool Board chairmen to keep them in touch with what is happening in the schools, the principal who is being evaluated receives a copy and he or she may use a copy in

applying for another position (a fact which almost certainly means that the writers of the reports write with an eye to a fellow superintendent who may one day be considering principal X for a job). Given this restricted audience it is perhaps rather remarkable that the reports are often so long and that superintendents obviously put care into their composition and are at pains to provide not just overall judgements, but judgements about the quality of almost every aspect they discuss. Could it be that these reports are not merely reports of evaluations but also a means by which superintendents establish and reinforce norms for the profession and for the principalship? The suggestion is not that these reports are deliberately composed charters, but that they are partly conscious, partly unconscious formalizations of what is to be seen as a good school and a good principal.

I this is the case, and if one function of the reports is to establish norms, to formalize and emphasise what it is that superintendents believe, then it is reasonable to ask how rational is their approach to evaluation. On the surface there is an evident rationality of approach in the reports. And yet, a nagging question is posed by the finding that reports on principals who are rated as "Excellent" and "Very Good" contain twice as many accounts of action by the principal as do the reports on their less highly rated fellows.

One possible explanation is that, like most of us who

commit ourselves to something we like, superintendents have no trouble justifying what they see as a good principal. What this explanation means is that the superintendent knows who his excellent principals are and in looking at them and their schools is able to find ample evidence to show that they are excellent.

If this interpretation is correct, then the present findings do not tell an aspiring principal what he should do if he wants to be favourably rated, they tell the favourably viewed principal what it is about him or her that will be noticed. They do not enable the researcher to predict that a modestly effective principal will become excellent if he or she does thus and so, they allow the researcher to predict that if a principal is rated "Excellent" by the superintendent, the superintendent will be well able to describe certain things about that principal. The difference may be trivial if we want to know what is associated with excellence. It is probably not trivial if we want to develop excellence.

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